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REVIEWS.

RECENT FICTION.

THEY THAT TOOK THE SWORD. By Nathaniel Stephenson. London and New York: John Lane. 1901.

Any one who takes up Mr. Nathaniel Stephenson's book with the expectation of reading a conventional "war novel" will meet with disappointment. He will, however, lay it down with the consciousness of having gained something the average novel most frequently fails to furnish. Indeed, the work, though a romance, is not a novel at all, in the common misuse of that term; and it early proves its own prefatory disclaimer of the intent to teach history, or to depict what are—so often falsely—supposed to be great and stirring scenes of the war between the States. The task this author has set himself is a far more difficult, and doubtless more important, one. In a clear-cut, bold, and interesting portrait, evidently from life, he holds before the reader the "agnostic" of early war days.

For years preceding the actual conflict, and long after the first gun at Sumter had sent foreboding echoes to the confines of the Union, there were thousands of well-meaning and honorable men who could not decide for themselves which side of the inevitable struggle was the just one. Whether their indecision came from reasoning upon a subject that was wholly one of sentiment and inborn principle, need not be discussed here. But the war agnostic was an existent and a nowise unimportant factor in determining the levies of soldiers, and sometimes the action of doubtful States. This was especially true of the "border States," as Ohio, Maryland, Missouri, and some others were then known. Strange as it may appear to the reader of to-day only, there was one critical moment when Ohio hung so balanced in opinion that a feather's weight might have

thrown her chief city, and with it her whole commonwealth, into the Confederate scale.

It is at this moment, with its feverish uncertainties and doubts, that Mr. Stephenson has timed his narration. Its pivotal character, while not its "hero," is a man of good mind, gentle birth, and honorable instincts, who honestly strives to convince himself, by cold logic, of his real duty to his country and himself. It is simple justice to say that this characterization of Col. Kainson rises to the plane of a positive creation. The mentality, morality, and motives of the man are shown in a manner as fresh as it is strong.

Apparently with intent, the author has made this agnostic the book. Others of the many actors in the story are clever, lifelike, and interesting; the unambitious plot moves with an ease rare to a first novel on any theme; and the descriptive ability in putting old Cincinnati plainly and topographically in the view of a younger era is masterly. But the interest all centers in the indecision of Kainson; in the doubts and variance it causes between his sons—both well-drawn characters, and one of them peculiarly artistic—and in the severance of families theretofore as a clan. Ever disclaiming greatness for his book, Mr. Stephenson has certainly achieved so much of it as adheres to a novel and unique characterization, faithfully set forth and carrying with it much that is new in historic sketch. A cultivated and philosophic style has added to it the new charm of fresh and direct power of statement; often with quaint flashes of epigram and a trifle of subacid satire that flavors a most appetizing whole. For this new author is most of all a philosopher. He is content to take human nature as it is, even while pausing to consider why it *is* so.

His narration flows smoothly through an ease and polish of diction that makes the reader wonder as to this being a "first novel." His love scenes are fresh and simple, ever permeated with a subtle humor that suggests he is laughing at reader and lover alike. The pride, the foibles, and the high tone of a generation fifty years gone are shown out in clear profiles, touched with a subtle use of humor. They are

olden portraits stepping out of their frames. Everywhere apparent is the knack of the practiced writer, of putting an idea in a terse paragraph. He speaks of that old class "who could still put a dash of color into evening dress;" and again of the Sabbath passage from church as that "clearing house of gossip, the aftermath of the service."

Mr. Stephenson's book is coincident with Mr. Churchill's "The Crisis" in more than mere simultaneity. The latter treats, though far more discursively, of similar conditions existent in St. Louis at the opening of the war. Both have divided families, warring brothers, and hesitant patriots, in theme. Strangely, both have pairs of cousins, as undecided lovers; and both make the "hero" stand capture, trial, and sentence to hang as a spy, only to be saved in similar fashion—that is, through a pilgrimage to Washington by the heroine, her penetrating into Mr. Lincoln's private office, and that good man's granting pardon at once for my lady's eyes. Oddest of all, both pairs of lovers meet in the President's sanctum, are left alone by that most sagacious statesmen, and there renew their troth. Yet there is indisputable proof that neither author could possibly have suspected the other's theme, far less his treatment of it. The volumes were issued at almost the same time: one in London, the other in New York. To discuss their merits relatively would demand space not at hand. It may only be suggested that Mr. Stephenson's picture of President Lincoln will be surer to meet the approval of that great man's world-spread admirers than the rival and coincidental portrait of "The Crisis."

T. C. DE LEON.

HENRY BOURLAND: *The Passing of the Cavalier*. By Albert Elmer Hancock. New York: The Macmillan Company. 1901.

From the same publishing house as "The Crisis," but not with the same practiced literary art, comes "Henry Bourland," a novel of Reconstruction in Virginia. Its author, Mr. Hancock, is stated to be a Philadelphian, who, however, must have spent some of his years in the mountains and valleys of the western counties of Virginia. From this point of view the